

THE “IDAHO IDEA” AND IDAHO’S NATIONAL FIRE PLAN PROGRAMS

In the early years of the last century, prior to the historic 1910 Fire and others, the State of Idaho, US Forest Service, and the timber industry decided to form timber protective associations statewide to collaborate and provide mutual aid in the event of wildland fire, regardless of ownership. This became known as the “Idaho Idea”, being that this was the first model in the West where all the main stakeholders decided to work together in fire prevention and suppression. In a way, this was the first Idaho State Fire Plan. Today, the recently signed *Idaho Statewide Implementation Strategy for the National Fire Plan* continues to amplify and expand the same spirit of collaboration and cooperation first envisioned over 100 years ago.

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) of 2003 addressed many issues relevant and complementary to the National Fire Plan; this includes expediting projects designed to reduce hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface and on adjacent federal land. HFRA also allows local entities to create Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). The Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group’s “idea” is to focus on Idaho’s counties as the best and most efficient way to deliver federal National Fire Plan dollars to the community level. In Idaho, we have chosen to continue working at the county level; therefore we call the CWPPs *County Wildfire Protection Plans*. All 44 counties in Idaho have developed and signed their CWPPs.

Many county wildland fire mitigation committees (which are comprised of county fire and emergency personnel, local fire wardens, federal and tribal partners, and other interested stakeholders) in Idaho use their CWPPs to establish priority areas that not only identify hazardous fuel reduction needs on private property, but also work with their US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and tribal partners to help achieve fuel reduction on land owned by these agencies adjacent to private property. By integrating larger, landscape-scale fuel reduction across ownerships, more effective community-wide protection can be established. These CWPPs are periodically updated by the local committees to reflect projects completed and to address changing priorities within the county.

In 2006, Idaho Department of Lands (in cooperation with the US Forest Service State and Private Forestry) awarded \$953,685 to State Fire Assistance and Community Fire Protection Hazardous Fuels Treatment (HFT) projects around the State. To date, 12,192 acres have been treated at an average cost of \$903.50 per acre. For more information on this and other collaborative programs and collective efforts of all members of the Idaho State Fire Plan Working Group implemented under the National Fire Plan in Idaho, please visit www.idahofireplan.org or www.idl.idaho.gov.



Typical of many Hazardous Fuels Reduction projects Statewide



VOLUNTEER FIRE ASSISTANCE (VFA)

The VFA Program provides federal financial assistance to organize, train, and equip fire departments in rural areas and rural communities. The VFA Program facilitates distribution of available funding to those fire departments determined to be most in need. Over 75% of the Nation’s fire departments are volunteer (more than 200 in Idaho). Volunteer fire departments provide nearly 80% of initial attack on wildland fires in the United States. The Forest Service established the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program (VFA) to help these crucial volunteers through their State Foresters (Idaho Department of Lands in Idaho). This year IDL received 78 grant applications with a total request of \$640,249; of these, 44 rural volunteer fire departments received VFA awards totaling \$187,530. For more information on this and other grant programs in Idaho, please visit: www.idl.idaho.gov or www.idahofireplan.org.



St. Maries FPD – Idaho VFA Recipient